



Customer Service *Connections*

A publication of Saint Paul Regional Water Services

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new Customer
Information
System***

***What is the
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***To Serve You
Better***

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Granular Activated Carbon filters reduce taste and odor

In the first year of use, Saint Paul Regional Water Services' new granular activated carbon (GAC) filtration system reduced taste and odor complaints by 92 percent; from 187 complaints in 2006 down to 15 in 2007. This year to date, utility staff have registered even fewer complaints.

"Along with improvements we have been making in our source water quality over the last 20 years, the GAC system has really improved the aesthetic quality of the water," said Jim Bode, water quality supervisor. "We are cautiously optimistic that it will continue to do so in the future."

There was never any question of water safety. However, seasonal algae blooms in the chain of lakes the utility uses to naturally filter water coming from the Mississippi River had regularly caused taste and odor issues

in the spring and fall since the 1900s.

In 2005, after our customers indicated their willingness to pay more for improved water, the utility renovated its existing filters and installed GAC media in the new filters. The plant improvements and the GAC media filters were a \$10 million investment that significantly reduced taste and odor issues along with complaints. Completed in 2007, the GAC filters have made it possible for the utility to remove the largest taste and odor culprit: geosmin—a molecular-level component of algae that the human nose can detect at rates as low as five parts per trillion. The GAC media also functions as a traditional filter media, removing particulate matter and providing a barrier against organisms such as *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*.

"We are very pleased with the results to date," said Steve Schneider, general manager.

Water rate increase proposed for 2009

SPRWS staff has proposed an increase of 9.9 percent for its 2009 budget. This means the current average rate of \$1.91 per unit (748 gallons) will increase to \$2.10. For an average family of four, the impact of this increase would amount to an additional \$4.18 per quarterly bill. SPRWS is requesting this increase to offset inflationary increases in our operations and maintenance budget, especially

increases in chemical, electricity, and labor costs. SPRWS is entirely self supporting, with most of its revenue obtained through the sale of water.

This proposal was made in July to the Board of Water Commissioners, who will recommend their 2009 budget in October. Once this recommendation is made, the budget will be forwarded to the Saint Paul City Council for public hearings in November and final approval in December.

Our mission is to provide reliable, quality water and services at a reasonable cost.

To Serve You Better

To make a credit card payment, or to get information on your account status, call (651) 266-6350, 24 hours a day.

To talk to a Customer Service Representative call Customer Service at (651) 266-6350, between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday - Friday.

Bills may be paid in the following ways:

Credit Card

Over the telephone, 24 hours a day, or in person at McCarrons Center, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 1900 Rice St., Maplewood. We accept *Visa*, *MasterCard*, *Discover*, and *American Express* credit/debit cards.

Money Order or Check

In person, by return mail with your bill stub, or in one of our drop boxes:

For next-day processing, at McCarrons Center. The drop box is located in the visitor parking area; available 24 hours a day.

For 48-hour processing, located at Saint Paul City Hall, 15 Kellogg Blvd., West. Doors are open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and visitors must pass through security.

Cash

In person only, at McCarrons Center, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Direct Payment Plan

Have your payment deducted electronically from your checking or savings account. You'll still receive a statement; it will indicate which date the payment will be deducted from your account.

\$6.36 charge covers Safe Drinking Water Act fee

On bills issued during October - December, 2008, you will see a fee of \$6.36, designated for the Safe Drinking Water Act. This fee is added to your bill annually. The State of Minnesota directs SPRWS to collect this charge with your water bill.

The money goes to the Minnesota Department of Health to test all drinking water in the state; it is mandated as part of Phase V of the Environmental Protection Agency Safe Drinking Water Act.

New Customer Information System will improve service

About three years ago, we decided to increase the efficiency and convenience of services to our customers with a new Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system as well as a new Customer Information System (CIS). We completed the first project by fully implementing the new IVR system in April 2008. As you may know, the IVR now gives our customers access to their account information and to make credit card payments 24 hours a day. Many customers are already taking full advantage of these new conveniences.

We are also more than half-way through the CIS project. During the first phase of the project (i.e., "assessment"), we performed analyses of our options—i.e., whether to upgrade our current system or acquire a new CIS. To help with our decision, we looked at the experiences of similar utilities, analyzed leading water industry practices, analyzed costs and benefits and defined what it means to have an effective CIS. Ultimately, we decided that a new system would be the best alternative for better services to our customers.

Once we made that decision, we went through an exhaustive process of defining approximately 1600 functional requirements for a new system to meet our needs in 12 business areas including, for example, customer billing and management of customer accounts, finances, service orders and inventory.

For the second phase of the project ("vendor selection"), we issued a public Request for Proposal from CIS vendors on April 20, 2007. We received eight proposals, and on August 8, 2007, we selected three finalists. The three vendors came to our facilities to demonstrate their products to our employees; many of them participated in hands-on demonstrations.

In January of 2008, we decided to enter into negotiations with Advanced Utility Systems (AUS) to purchase their Infinity CIS. User buy-in and ease of use were key factors in the choice of AUS. We signed a contract with AUS on June 25, 2008.

We are now in the third phase—"implementation"—which, stated briefly, includes converting the data for our 96,000 customer accounts in our current system for use in Infinity, incorporating our business processes into the new application, developing interfaces with our other systems, performing several stages of testing, providing extensive training for employees, and going live successfully. We expect the entire implementation process to take 12 to 15 months.

After implementation, many of our current manual processes will be more automated, including cashiering services, final billing, billing adjustments, payment arrangements, notifications to customers, and permit and new service applications. We will also be able to track customer complaints better to ensure appropriate resolution. Since customer information will be easier to access, it also will be easier for our Call Center to resolve customer inquiries in one telephone call.

Once we complete this initial implementation of the core CIS in the fall of 2009, we will be adding more capabilities, including an "E-Care" module, which will allow our customers to take care of most of their billing needs over the Internet.

We believe that our investment in these technologies will not only make it easier for our employees to serve our customers, but that our customers will also see some very direct benefits in their dealings with SPRWS.